

St Pius & St Anthony Christmas Homily 2026 Year A

Christmas is a feast of our senses - sights, sounds and smells: Of course, we have the lights and candles, the songs and carols and the aromatic foods, oils, incense! Or from our reading tonight we pick up the illuminated angel and radiance of many of them in the sky, but also the clamor of the crowds and heralding noises spreading around and the smells of the animals, their stalls/pens along with the open fires, used for warmth, or security or cooking.

That is so Christmas! Speaking of stimulated senses, we all have our own cozy, comfort-memories of past Christmases that stir up our senses: ***our favorite things.*** Yes, I'm going nostalgic on you; walk with me. Recalling 'early morning movements in the dark', and 'buzzing excitement' make me think of a couple of great Christmas memories of me 'back in the day' when I had a paper route-Yes I was once a paper-boy. And the paper delivery-route provided me lots of smells: if it wasn't the strong smell of inks/newsprint, then it could be the rubber, from the big bag of rubber bands we used on windy days or even the plastic of the wrap-bags we used on rainy ones, that had a unique smell – & color too-they were always orange—but the best part was the being out so early before sunrise and getting to see it come out, (like those shepherds). And, I'd love more than anything, in the winter to catch a whiff as I drove through yards, maybe people had opened doors to check if I'd been through yet, and scents of bacon being fried would be in the air, or the most delicious gravy cooking in their homes, or the outside smell of wood fires, from smoke out of their chimneys – always smelled so good!! And a further show of how sensory, (sensate) a job that was for me, I liked how even the bundles of papers could affect my sense of touch - because on cold mornings, it was always refreshing to grab a new paper to throw, by reaching into the middle of the paper bundle, where they were still warm from press and that felt good to cold fingers on frosty mornings! But above all, It was such good exercise, and the work made such refreshingly quiet and peaceful mornings.

And how this all relates to Christmas is that some of my most favorite delivery days were Christmas Eve & Morning, not because of all the decorations still out in yards, or the good moods of everyone, or the tips that abounded, but because ***on that one night*** in particular, several of us paper boys had the custom to go early and pick up their own bundled paper shipments from the loading dock downtown at the plant, to go ahead and deliver early the news by 1:00 or 2:00 am (*to get done and then go to bed and forget alarms in the morning!*). A perfect schedule might have been to attend midnight mass, pick up the bundles and then advance-deliver the papers in the night, and then enjoy the next morning when the 5:00 am alarm buzzes, to just turn it off for good, and roll back over - sweet dreams! It just happened one time a year, but wow it was a pleasant change-up!

Isn't such a memory, a reversal/opposite of what you'd think would excite me on Christmas? Many kids couldn't wait to spring out of bed as soon as the sun came up Christmas morning, and there I was, relishing the covers and bed a little longer into the morning! But doesn't that happen in life, reversals or flips of our expectations that bring joy? For example when we were little we **fought, to not** take a nap, and now we fight ('cause we're irritable), if we don't get a nap? Or as kids we resented to not be able to pick our own choice for what to eat for dinner, and as we get older we resist the freedom, like how many couples do you know that almost argue and resist when given the choice – how often we hear "What would you like for dinner?" "Oh, I don't know, you pick." "NO, what are you hungry for?" *When we can pick now, we don't want to!*

But my point in bringing up the newspaper delivery story is that the '**little things**' made such an enjoyable difference to me! Just the little thing of a changed-up schedule and sleeping a little more or waking to normal breakfast time was such a treat! AND that is like Christmas: It is a celebration of small things! The little things we are meant to love! In fact, God seems to choose the small things to surprise us with grace & gift us with new life. Christmas highlights **the small** in life for us to appreciate them!

Our reading exalts 1) small possessions, 2) small people and 3) small places as God's preferred choice! Let's take a moment to notice how God was born into this world Himself small? What is important to God, can be gleaned from how He chose to enter this world?

- 1) Among Small possessions** because the Holy Family happens to be on the move (and don't we know that it is best to travel light - not much stuff along for the ride) but also, they notice they struggle to find a room, and have to borrow/share not only the animals' shelter-shed, but also borrow a bed-the animals' feedbox becomes Christ's crib. And we won't find Jesus wrapped in in a special birth robe or linen onesie, but in just simple bands of cloth strips to wrap him in warmly (*this smallness in possessions will continue all thru Messiah's life – 'No hwre to lay his head' Mat 8:20 -same Jesus who said 'Sell everything & follow me' (Matt 19:21) as He borrows and shares all his life, borrowing that donkey for the ride into Jerusalem (Matt 21:2-3), borrowed upper room for last supper (Matt 26:18), and even a borrowed tomb from Joseph Arimathea (Matt 27:59-60).*
- 2) God also prefers, small people** as we find not just in the example of regular common people that Joseph/Mary are, who are helplessly pushed around by government mandates (forced census of Caesar/their relocation). But Joseph already as a manual worker was likely used to following work-

travelling to find work wherever the job site was – and Mary of course, was the simple ‘young ‘lil’ maiden (Luke 1:38) But also the first visitors to show up at this birth scene, were not the local dignitaries or more popular elites whose reservations were honored at those inns. No, the first to be there, were also, the small people. The late night shift of shepherds, the frontline workers who keep economies going, always unrecognized and left out--The lowly shepherds get the first glimpse, and share in God’s appearance first! (*recall that Bethlehem was also the home of David, God’s pick but the least likely, & last candidate suggested by Jesse to Samuel as future leader- little shepherd boy out working in the field 1 Samuel 16:9-11*)

3) And God chose small places to show up in. Not in Rome, not Jerusalem, not Caesarea, but born in the ‘little O town of Bethlehem’, forgotten and out of the way city, which Micah 5:2, called it ‘least of places’ and from Book of Joshua 15:21-62, we find out among his list of ‘who’s who’ among Judean towns/cities of up to 115 different ones named, Bethlehem doesn’t even get a mention!

So, where will God show up to us? We are surprised, refreshingly! Not on flashy stages, not among worldly important people, not in the capital or at headquarters, but always among the lowly, the hardworking, the thoughtful & caring neighbors, like 1) the shepherds who are just going about completing their shift, like 2) Mary and Joseph just being responsible and attending to what they have to do and like 3) the good neighbors who open their barn/shed to help a young couple and later check in on that traveling young couple with their newborn little one. That is our God, who St Paul says in 1 Cor 1:27-28 “God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly to show out the mighty....” Our god that Mary prayed about in Luke 1:52 that “He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones, but lifted up the lowly”.

That is our Messiah, our king who teaches us so many times and in so many ways, that the “humbled will be exalted”(Matthew 23:12) and the “least is the greatest” (Luke 9:48). But most especially, this is our God, who shows us where he dwells, when He says, “What you did to the least, you do to me?” (Matthew 25:40,45)

Philippians 2:7 about Jesus - “He emptied himself” taking the lowest position.....